



**CITY OF SOMERVILLE, MASSACHUSETTS**  
**MAYOR'S OFFICE OF STRATEGIC PLANNING & COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT**  
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**PLANNING DIVISION**  
**HISTORIC PRESERVATION**

April 26, 2021  
Case: HPC.ALT 2021.21  
Site: 33 Warren Avenue

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**ALTERATION OF A LOCAL HISTORIC DISTRICT PROPERTY**  
**STAFF REPORT**

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**Site:** 33 Warren Avenue

**Applicant:** 33 Warren Ave., LLC

**Owner:** same as applicant

**Petition:** *Install new walkway and create new driveway*

**HPC Hearing Date:** April 26, 2021



## **I. PROJECT DESCRIPTION**

- 1. Subject Property:** The subject property is historically known as the George A. Kimball House, constructed in 1877. Historic and architectural history of this Italianate building can be found on the Form B (appended).
- 2. Proposal:** Without permission from the HPC, the Applicant changed the materials on the front walkway and created a new driveway where none previously existed at the time of installation.

While the Applicant had received a Certificate of Appropriateness (CA) for alterations to the building in 2019, that CA did not include permissions for the walkway and driveway.

Changes in materials (such as the case with the walkway) and feature changes (such as the installation of a driveway where none previously existed) come under the purview of the HPC.

The Applicant seeks the following:

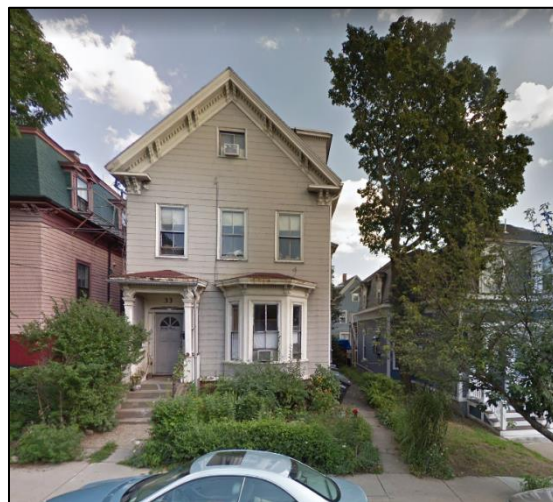
- retroactive permission to install a grey paver walkway leading from the public way to the front steps of the house
- retroactive permission to create a grey paver driveway with stone veneer curbing where a driveway did not exist at the time of installation.

**\*\*Note:** The HPC must be aware that they are not obligated to approve work that was done without permission.

Of additional note, the Form B photograph shows a car parked in the front yard at the time (1988). However, there is no evidence of a driveway on the property – there was a cement walkway and plantings at the time the 2019 CA was issued for the building work. There has been no curb cut at this location nor any driveway for at least 14 years, if ever a curb cut or legal driveway existed. Staff has provided evidentiary photos below:



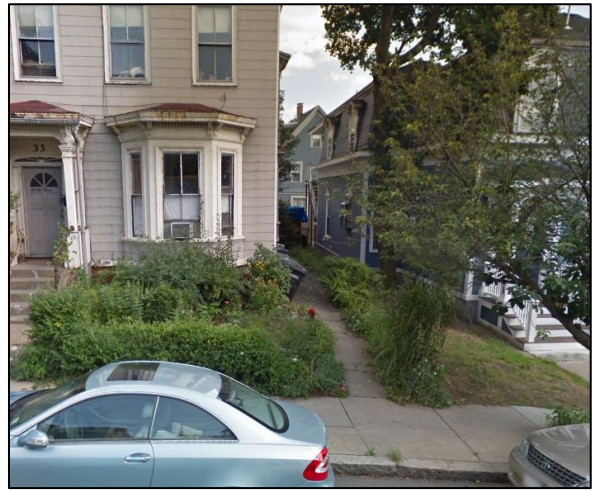
2007 – walkway/plantings



2011 – walkway/plantings



2013 walkway/plantings



2017 walkway/plantings



Fall, 2020 - driveway

## **II. FINDINGS**

The HPC must make findings based on the Historic District Ordinance (HDO) in compliance with M.G.L. Chapter 40C, and associated Design Guidelines. The portions of the regulations that are applicable to the proposed alterations are discussed below.

The applicable Somerville LHD Design Guideline is *H: Landscape Features and Paving*”, with the following sections relevant:

- 1. The general intent of this section is to preserve the existing or later essential landscape features that enhance the property.*



## Front walkway

**Applicant Proposal:** The Applicant/Owner seeks retroactive permission to install a grey paver walkway leading from the public way to the front steps of the house.

**Preservation Planning Assessment:** Changes in materials require the review and approval of the HPC. The Applicant/Owner has installed a grey paver walkway leading from the public way (sidewalk) to the front entry steps.

At the time that this house was constructed (1877), granite cobble, which these pavers most closely approximate, were not a typical use for walkways on properties of this economic class. If a property owner could afford it, brick would have been the most appropriate form of hardscape, particularly given the preponderance of brickyards in Somerville at the time. Most common would be simply a dirt path, which is not a reasonable expectation today.

The above noted, Preservation Planning Staff recommends to the Commission that the Applicant/Owner remove the inappropriate material and re-install the walkway using either brick or a brick-like paver system. Conditions thereto are recommended in the Conditions section.

## Driveway

**Applicant Proposal:** The Applicant/Owner seek retroactive permission to create a grey paver driveway with stone veneer curbing where a driveway did not exist at the time of installation.

**Preservation Planning Assessment:** Staff finds that the installation of the un-permitted driveway has significantly altered the land features green space that enhanced the property (quality of plantings and previous level of care of the green area are not a subject for consideration or discussion). Walkways, ramps, and stairs on a property are influenced by the historic patterns of use of a site. Driveways and parking areas, where original, speak to the transportation history of the City and the property. However, no driveway has been found to have existed on this site (see earlier Staff comments).

Simply because a driveway might not have existed on a property does not mean that a new one cannot be installed depending on the circumstances. However, there has been no curb cut found to have existed on this site for at least 14-33 years, dating back at least to when the Form B was created in 1988 for the LHD property survey.

Until the Applicant/Owner created this driveway, green area and a concrete walkway existed. Staff finds that the property, in its current condition, has much more area covered by hardscaping than any other time prior to 2020 based on photographic evidence available. At present, the entirety of the back yard is covered in pavers save for the perimeter thereof (though this is not in the purview of the HPC). This new driveway runs nearly the length of the property and, in width, from the house foundation to the property line.

At most, early driveways at the dawn of the automobile era would have been a ribbon driveway with each ribbon band roughly equal to the width of a car tire. Grass would grow in between and around the ribbon driveway.

Staff does not recommend that the driveway remain. Rather, Staff recommends the removal of the driveway and associated curbing and the installation of a 36-inch wide walkway. Conditions for materials appear in the Recommended Conditions section.

**HPC Determination:**

- The HPC must determine if, based on a review of the documentation presented, the proposed project complies with the Design Guidelines.
  
- The HPC must structure their motion to include their own specific findings on the proposed project.

### **III. RECOMMENDED CONDITIONS**

Should the HPC decide to grant a Certificate of Appropriateness (CA), Preservation Planning suggests the following conditions to add to any approvals:

1. All relevant permits shall be obtained from ISD and all other departments, boards, or commissions prior to the start of work.
2. The Applicant/Owner shall upload their Certificate of Appropriateness to ISD's permitting system.
3. Any changes made to this proposal as a result of reviews by other permit-granting entities shall be submitted in the form of a new application to Preservation Planning for review and approval by the HPC.
4. The Applicant/Owner shall remove the existing walkway leading to the front entry and re-paver with brick or brick-colored pavers. The Applicant shall submit their proposed materials to Preservation Planning Staff for review and approval prior to ordering and installation.
5. The Applicant/Owner shall remove the full length of the driveway and the associated curbing. The Applicant may install a 36-inch wide walkway leaving from the public way to the rear of the property using the same brick or pavers reviewed and approved by Preservation Planning Staff for the walkway leading to the front entry. The area abutting this walkway should be landscaped.
6. The Applicant shall contact Preservation Planning at [historic@somervillema.gov](mailto:historic@somervillema.gov) a minimum of 15 business days prior to final ISD sign-off on this work so that Preservation Planning or their designee can confirm that the project was completed according to HPC approvals.